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ABSTRACT

Two studies, labeled A and B, were conducted (1) to investigate relationships between early infant and mother behaviors over situations and over time, (2) to explore relationships between maternal experiences and behavior, (3) to compare infant-mother pairs with and without interaction problems, and (4) to compare infant-mother pairs in which mothers were "intruding," i.e., showing high frequencies of contact and response behaviors not always adapted to infant signals, with pairs in which mothers did not intrude. In Study A, children were visited at home twice, at 6 weeks and at 4 months of age. In Study B, children between 1 and 5 months of age were visited at home once. Data were collected through direct observation, structured interviews, and a self-report questionnaire. Variables of Study A included the quantity of maternal interactive behavior; maternal sensitivity; infant social behavior; and mother's social support from family and friends, positive life events, negative life events, and pleasure in infant. Variables of Study B were maternal positive social behavior; maternal sensitivity; infant positive social behavior; infant signaling ability; and mother's social support from husband, general life situation, self-confidence, maternal preoccupation, and pleasure in infant. In general, findings suggest that it is possible to achieve early identification of interaction problems in mother-infant pairs via global impressions and verbal reports. (RH)

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EARLY INFANT-MOTHER INTERACTION AND MATERNAL EXPERIENCES

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Purposes: 1. To study relationships between early infant and mother behaviors over situations and over time.

2. To explore relationships between maternal experiences and behavior.

3. To compare infant-mother pairs with and without CHC-nurse detected problems.

4. To compare infant-mother pairs where mothers are judged as intruding with pairs where mothers are not intruding.

METHOD

	Study A	Study B
Selection:	Random selection from official birth registers of 30 infant-mother pairs.	Child Health Clinic nurses selected 10 infant-pairs with interaction problems (as judged by the nurse) and 22 pairs with no such problems. A second classification was based on observation data (see below): intruding mothers (n = 9) were defined as mothers, who on three on more (out of 20) observation items had shown insensitivity to infant signals by emitting extremely high frequencies of contact and response behaviors, not always adapted to infant signals. 23 mothers belonged to the non-intruding group. 4 pairs belonged to both the interaction problem group and to the intruding mother group.
Data Collection and Ages:	Two home visits at infant ages of 6 weeks and 4 months. Maternal ages: 22 - 43 years (M = 30 yrs).	One home visit at infant age 1 - 5 months (M = 3 mo.). Maternal ages: 18 - 41 years (M = 28 yrs).
Measures:	Direct observation in two interaction situations: 5 minutes of face- to face-interaction and one diaper changing session. Infant and mother behaviors were scored on 5-point scales with each step verbally defined (A and B). Structured interview about maternal experiences. Responses were scored on 5-point scales with each step verbally defined (A and B). Self-report questionnaire: Life Experiences Survey. Number and intensity of experiences of positive and negative life events during the past 6 months were reported (A).	

Variables:			
	Quantity of Maternal Interactive Behavior (summary scor)	Be-	Maternal Positive Social Behavior (summary score)
	Maternal Sensitivity (one summary scor and three separate item scores)	hav-	Maternal Sensitivity (global rating)
	Infant Social Behavior (summary score)	ior	Infant Positive Social Behavior (summary score)
			Infant Signalling Ability (global rating)
	Social Support from family and friends (summary score)		Social Support from husband (summary score)
	Positive Life Events (summary score)	Ex-	General Life Situation (summary score)
	Negative Life Events (summary score)	peri-	
		ences	Self-Confidence (summary score)
			Maternal Preoccupation (summary score)
	Pleasure in Infant (summary score)		Pleasure in Infant (summary score)

RESULTS STUDY A

Table 1

Stability of Behavior

Behavior	Over situations		Over time
	6 w.	4 mo.	6w. - 4 mo.
Quantity of maternal interactive Beh.	.48***	.61***	.54***
Maternal sensitivity	.40*	.43**	.65***
Infant social behavior	.59***	.54***	.23

n = 30

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .005
} one-tailed

Table 2

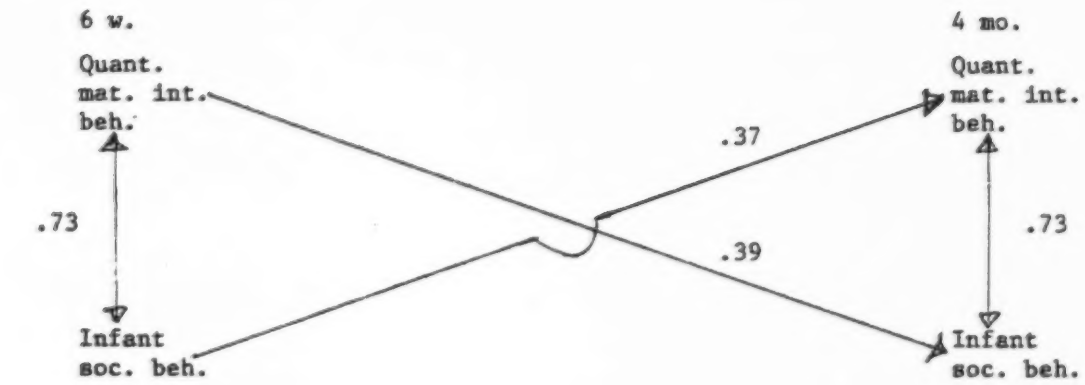
Product Moment Correlations Between Observed Maternal Behaviors and Maternal Experiences at Infant Age 6 Weeks

	Observed maternal behaviors				
	Summary scores		Singe items scores		
Maternal experiences	Quantity of mat. int. beh.	Mat. sensitivity	Responsivity to infant soc. beh.	Quality of care	Comforting behavior
Social support (family, friends)	.35*	.22	.25	.40*	.42*
Pos. life events	.39*	.39*	.49***	.31*	.41*
Neg. life events	.14	.24	.18	.21	.00
Pleasure in infant	.26	.47***	.28	.50***	.43**

n = 30

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .005$
} one-tailed

a)



b)

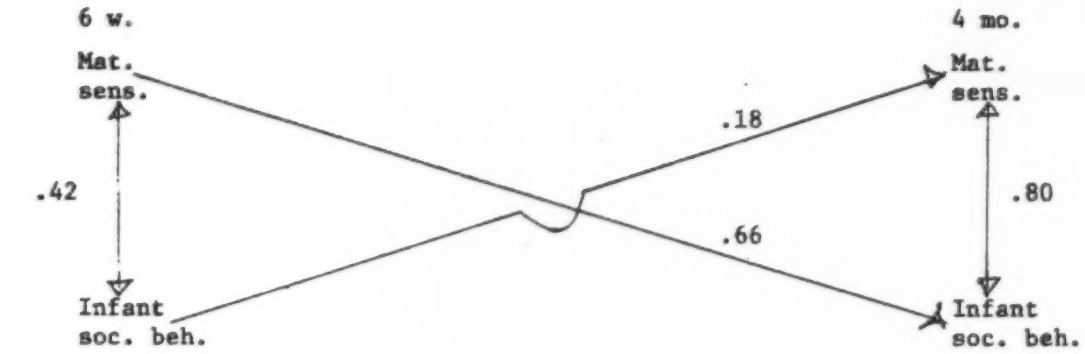


Figure 1. Product Moment Correlations Between Mother and Infant Behaviors Within Time and Over Time.

Table 3

Comparison Between Behaviors in the Mother-Infant Problem Group (n = 10) and the Mother-Infant Non-Problem Group (n = 22)

	Problem		Non-problem			
Behavior	M	sd	M	sd	t	p
Mat. pos. soc. beh.	2.62	.51	3.46	.44	4.75	<.001
Mat. sensitivity	1.95	.86	3.34	.61	5.26	<.001
Inf. pos. soc. beh.	2.22	.51	3.09	.70	3.53	<.001
Inf. signal. ability	1.90	1.13	3.09	.72	3.63	<.001

Table 4

Comparison Between Maternal Experiences in the Mother-Infant Problem Group (n = 10) and the Mother-Infant Non-Problem Group (n = 22)

Maternal experiences	Problem		Non-problem			
	M	sd	M	sd	t	p
Social support (husband)	3.31	.53	4.21	.43	5.05	<.001
Gen. life situation	3.10	.78	4.00	.54	3.75	<.001
Self-confidence	3.07	.74	3.88	.36	4.24	<.001
Mat. preocc.	3.13	.48	3.80	.47	3.71	<.001
Pleasure in infant	2.52	.55	3.43	.49	4.68	<.001

Table 5

Comparison Between Behaviors of Intruding Mothers and Their Infants (n = 9) and Non-Intruding Mothers and Infants (n = 23)

	Intruders		Non-intruders			
Behavior	M	sd	M	sd	t	p
Mat. pos. soc. beh.	2.93	.50	3.30	.62	1.60	.12
Mat. sensitivity	2.44	1.13	3.09	.82	1.79	<.10
Inf. pos. soc. beh.	2.32	.53	3.02	.75	2.56	<.05
Inf. signal. ability	1.94	1.26	3.02	.73	3.03	<.05

Table 6

Comparison Between Maternal Experiences of Intruding Mothers (n = 9) and Non-Intruding Mothers (n = 23)

Maternal experiences	Intruders		Non-intruders			
	M	sd	M	sd	t	p
Social support (husband)	3.50	.68	4.10	.52	2.67	<.05
Gen. life situation	3.33	.76	3.86	.69	1.58	<.10
Self-confidence	3.40	.68	3.71	.59	1.57	.20
Mat. preocc.	3.40	.69	3.67	.50	1.22	.23
Pleasure in infant	2.86	.63	3.25	.65	1.56	.13

CONCLUSIONS

1. During the first period of infant life, maternal behavior was relatively stable both across situations and over time, while infant social behavior was consistent over situations but not over time. There were clear relationships between infant and mother behaviors at each point in time.

2. Data suggest that early appearing maternal sensitivity to infant signals could have an enhancing effect on later infant social behavior. No such relationship was found between early infant social behavior and maternal sensitivity measured 2 1/2 months later.
   It is noteworthy that quantity of early appearing infant and mother social behaviors was about equally related to later partner behavior but less so than was early maternal sensitivity. The results allow maternal sensitivity to be interpreted as a mechanism in the Ainsworth sense, differing from the quantitative aspect of maternal behavior.

3. Self-reported experiences were related to behaviors indicative of maternal sensitivity to infant cues. Note that negative life events (i.e. stress) were not related to maternal behavior while positive events were.

4. CHC nurses' global impressions of mother-infant interaction problems were corroborated by findings from the systematic observations which showed less positive social behaviors from both mothers and infants in the problem group. It is particularly interesting that the groups also differed in maternal role experiences in a way that fits the Winnicott notion of preconditions for good mothering.

5. Finally, intruding mothers, who could be described as insensitive to infant cues in an overstimulating or impinging way, were found to have infants who were less socially active than the comparison group.

In sum, the data suggest that early identification of interaction problems in mother-infant pairs is possible to achieve via global impressions and verbal reports. In the light of maternal behavior stability and infant behavior malleability, early identification and intervention should be considered as important.